

Short, short version of EWM's biography.

I was born at 314 Goldhawk Rd. Hammersmith on 18 April 1904. At the time I believe that my father, who had recently left the army, was a contract salesman for Swifts, a big American meat Co.

My first memories are of living in Hastings where my father now kept a hotel - the Albany, in Havelock Rd. I had two sisters and a brother - Doris, Winifred and Walter. My father was Walter George and mother Isabel Mary. My mother's maiden name was Mason. Owing to the brewery who owned the hotel going broke we had to leave and I think my father lost a good deal of money. We moved to Acton where my father got a job with W. & G. DuCros through a member of that family he knew in Hastings.

Here I started school with the Misses Norman in Avenue road. It was one of the best type of kindergarten and gave me a good start. We were a very musical family, both my father and mother being fond of singing and soon had me following suit, My mother got me into the choir of St, Martin's, West Acton at the age of seven and some time later answered an advertisement for an audition of boys for the Chapel Royal Savoy. I attended and was accepted, being then about eight. This would be about 1912.

In September 1914 the school moved from Savoy Hill to Honor Oak in Surrey and became a boarding school. As a result I was never at home except in the holidays and leave periods when I was at sea. Throughout World War I the Savoy choir was very busy. Apart from the Chapel services we did mid-week services at St. Martin-in-the-Fields which included some big memorials for the fallen.

The Choirmaster was Colin Campbell, a fine musician and teacher. His brother, Commander A.B.Campbell was Paymaster in the armed merchant cruiser 'Otranto', serving with the 10th. Cruiser Squadron in the Pacific. On return to Britain he spent his leaves at the school and told thrilling stories of the Pacific and the remote islands. As a result my friend Dick Wood and I decided that we must go to sea in due course. This we achieved, Dick somewhat sooner than I, both of us going to the then newly established Nautical College Pangbourne.

I enjoyed my time at Pangbourne and did a lot of singing once more, my term master, R.M.Rayner being a keen musician who started the College choir. We did HMS 'Pinafore' and the dress rehearsal was attended by Rupert D'Oyly Carte who commented favourably on our achievement. I got to Pangbourne through a bursary from the Union-Castle Line, very cleverly organised by my sister Doris. This was for half fees without which my father had insisted that the project was impossible.

Two years at Pangbourne counted as one year at sea of the four years it was necessary to do before sitting for a 2nd.Mates ticket. On my leaving the college, after a holiday in Jersey, I joined the 'Dunvegan Castle' in the East India Dock. I caused some astonishment by taking my sea chest - as used at Pangbourne - with me and it needed the ship's carpenter to get it into the cadets' cabin.

Again I was in a very different world from the somewhat isolated one of the College. In many ways it was to me a very unpleasant one with crude language and ideas, but I got used to it in time. But life in a ship I liked apart from that and it did not take me long to become reasonably proficient in the various duties of a cadet. I was fascinated with all the new places and faces and learned a lot in a short time. I got used to being in a lower hold with a lot of rather fierce looking natives and endeavouring to stop the pilfering of cargo they seemed to consider their right. On one occasion I had to sew up a bad gash in a native's shoulder because the ship's surgeon was laid low with a high temperature. I am afraid I made a very poor job of it.

During my years as a cadet I had a number of interesting adventures of which I have given details in the manuscript of my book 'Simple Seaman' (Part One). The most disturbing was the occasion of my first visit to Hamburg early in 1921. I had been ashore with Gelson, the senior cadet, and were on our way back to the 'Jollyferry'. This was a craft that ran a service to ships lying at dolphins in the stream at regular times. We lost our way in a not very salubrious quarter of the town. Gelson went into a cafe below street level and came out again with a very large German who spoke with a pronounced American accent. This individual was trying to get him, and me, to go back and have a drink. Gelson declined with thanks saying we had just about time to catch the last ferry. Suddenly the man turned and ran down the steps into the cafe. Gelson said 'Lets go', and we took to our heels at a fast gallop. We only got about twenty yards start before the whole cafe turned out shouting what seemed to be unpleasant slogans ! We came to a bridge still leading by a few lengths. At that time all bridges were guarded as if it were still wartime and one was supposed to stop and show one's permit. The guard was not outside his little hut and Gelson did not hesitate and I followed. Within seconds we heard a shout of 'Halte' and as we did not comply, another warning shout followed by a bang and the whistle of a bullet. But we were now in the dark and as luck would have it, not far from the ferry. Gelson who was about nineteen took it all as matter of course having been in Hamburg several times before. I was not so philosophical.

That was my first trip in 'Goorkha' and I remained in her for nearly two years. My shipmates changed from time to time but we were always a cheerful, friendly lot although the conversation and language was rarely that of the drawing-room variety. In August 1922 I joined 'Bampton Castle', a 5,000 ton cargo ship built during the war. Except for the bridge and round the Captain's cabin all decks were steel and naturally got very hot in the tropics. We cadets and most of the seamen went barefooted and at times could feel our feet sizzling. The captain was an alcoholic and no more suitable for the job than a clown. He relied entirely on his officers who we soon decided were not a great deal better. So one way and another the two voyages round Africa - out east through the Med. and home west via Las Palmas and Pauillac - which I did in her were really rough and gruff. As senior cadet a great deal of the work of planning stowage of cargo - Cloves, mealies, hides and a lot of copper and lead ingots - was left to me.

One night when we were loading cloves at Zanzibar and I was down the main hold the warmth and heady smell of cloves made me very sleepy and I dropped off. When I woke I could hardly move and found I was in complete darkness and surrounded by bales of cloves. I had been buried alive ! I shouted at the top of my voice but for a few moments all was silence and I was close to panic. Then I heard a bale being moved and a working light shone down from above and I could see a ring of grinning black faces. Hands reached down and pulled me up. The serang shook his head, 'You no good watchman,' he said. I had to agree.

Later in that voyage I developed malaria and by the time we got to Durban I was very ill. The Chief Officer sent for the ship's surgeon of the Mailboat in port and he came and examined me at night with the aid of a torch. Being a cargo ship the generators were only run during working hours. I was not very comfortable.

On both my trips in 'Bampton Castle' we called at Pauillac in the Gironde river where we discharged a thousand tons or so of copper ingots. The rise and fall of the tide here was about 40ft and mooring lines needed constant tending. We rather enjoyed our stay at Pauillac as we were paid £2 a day for tallying out the copper ingots - they were said to be worth about £100 each so a careful tally was necessary.

Probably for the same reason we did not work at night and found our way to the nearest estaminet where wine was a few sou a glass and about one shilling and sixpence a bottle! We came back to the ship singing to the accompaniment of a croaking chorus of hundreds of frogs.

On my return from the second voyage in 'Bampton' I found a letter from the Admiralty awaiting me, telling me to join the somewhat ancient battleship 'King George V' on 21 May 1923. This I did and in the train en route I was joined by another Union-Castle cadet named Mosey. We became firm friends and on leaving 'KGV' after three months both joined the destroyer 'Viceroy'. There were 29 probationary midshipmen altogether in KGV, about a third each straight from Worcester, Conway and Pangbourne. Mosey, I and two others had all finished or nearly finished our indentures so were old sea dogs compared with the others. The midshipmen all slept in hammocks on a lower deck but did not have to lash-up and stow hammocks as this was done by Marine servants. We were given a very intensive training in gunnery and signals, it being assumed presumably that we had already had a good grounding in navigation. We also did a lot of boatwork including running one of the steam picket boats. This was the prime job and great fun, especially in bad weather. They had a speed of over twelve knots and put up a sizable wash on entering Weymouth harbour, causing a number of complaints from the Harbour Master.

But 'Viceroy' was the highlight of the training and I learnt a lot that my U-C training had missed. 'Viceroy' belonged to the 2nd Destroyer Flotilla which consisted of eight ships and a flotilla leader. We did full calibre shoots, torpedo attacks at full speed which were very exciting and took part in gas trials somewhere in the region of Rockall. Both Mosey and I were sorry to leave 'Viceroy'. Her captain was G.A Scott who later became an admiral.

We left 'Viceroy' on 20 November 1923 and on return home I promptly signed on at a crammers in the hope of getting my 2nd Mates certificate before Christmas. This I managed to do which was a great relief and allowed me to celebrate successfully.

However, I was due for a set back. On reporting to the Union-Castle offices in Fenchurch St. proudly waving my pristine certificate, I was told bluntly, 'No jobs. Half the fleet is laid up.' As far as I was concerned this was the first experience of what became a series of shipping slumps.

After a little thought I wrote to the Chaplain of the Savoy Chapel and asked if he could help me. He could. He just happened to know the chairman of the P&O company and within a matter of days I was attending the P&O offices for medical examination. I well remember this as when asked by the doctor if I had had any tropical diseases I replied that I had had malaria. He shook his head. 'Fortunately for you I did not hear what you said,' he muttered, and proceeded to pass me as fit.

A couple of days later I joined the 'Caledonia' in the Royal Albert dock as a supernumerary officer. I didn't stay long as almost immediately I was told to proceed to Tilbury prepared to join the 'Barrabool' for voyage to Australia. As I had only a suitcase with me it looked like being a pierhead jump ! I was told that the 4th Mate had gone sick and I was a last minute replacement. I had barely got on board with the last of the passengers when a boat came off from the shore with the 'sick' 4th Mate waving anxiously. I went ashore in his boat. It was the shortest voyage I have ever done.

Next I joined the 'Balranald' in the King George dock. She was also on the Australia via the Cape run. Outward bound with immigrants and one class passengers homeward. Her Captain was Basil Ohlson, a Captain RNR and an extremely pleasant man. My shipmates were also good fellows and I remained in the ship for a number of voyages. The Chief Mate was one 'Alphabetical Carter'. So called from his many Christian names which I can't remember. He was extremely kind and fatherly and introduced me to a number of families in Sydney which made the stays there - usually a month - very pleasant indeed. I got on very well with Adele Shelley and I have often said that had I done one more voyage to Australia I should have been hooked !

My next move was to the new ship 'Ranchi' which was destined to make her maiden voyage to Cowes for Cowes Week with a distinguished list of guests of Lord Inchape and the Company. I was appointed as supernumary 4th Officer. In company with two other young officers and the ship's 4/O our duties were that of coxswains of the 4 ship's motor lifeboats which were to act as tenders. It turned out to be an interesting and at times amusing job which brought us into very close touch with many famous people like Prince and Princess Arthur of Connaught (I danced with the Princess !) Lord Birkenhead, J.H Thomas and a number of others. There were three hundred guests all told. One of those I put ashore at the Squadron steps was Admiral Lord Jellicoe who proved to be a tiny little man.

After Cowes the ship spent the rest of the summer foreign cruising with the four of us still running our boats. We began with a trip to the Norwegian fjords followed by various other interesting ports but which I cannot remember.

After cruising 'Ranchi' began her normal duty as a Bombay mail ship and the three additional 4th Mates were available for other appointments. I was told I would be kept at home on dock staff, which meant I was to be used to relieve officers going on leave, sometimes by standing by a ship in dock and at others by doing coastal voyages to places like Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg and to Middlesbrough and Immingham. I did not enjoy my time in the various docks in nearly deserted ships.

This sometimes meant unloading valuable bales of silk all night. On another occasion an engineer was attacked by an Agwallah (fireman) who hit him with a large spanner, fracturing his skull. I was the only other officer on board and had to get police, and ambulance and spent a thoroughly unpleasant Saturday afternoon.

Some of the coastal trips were quite pleasant. One in the 'Karmarla' with Captain Cornwall-Jones was definitely amusing. Captain C-J was quite a character, as indeed many ship's captains are. He travelled with a large number of canaries in cages which were placed on deck alongside his cabin. He was said to call them all by name. Another little idiosyncrasy was that he tended to sing orders in the tunes of nursery rhymes. A favourite one was 'I think we'll have an azimuth' to the tune of 'Here we go gathering nuts in May.'

Another little incident occurred when we were on passage from Rotterdam to Antwerp via the inner channel. We had a Dutch pilot on the bridge when the Captain came up. 'Have you ever been through this channel before, Third Mate?' he asked. In fact I had and told him that on that occasion the pilot managed to put us ashore not far from Flushing. At that moment the pilot called out 'Hard over!' to the helmsman and rushed to the engineroom telegraph and rang down full astern on one engine. The Captain did not bat an eyelid, 'Looks as if it is about to happen again, he said quite calmly. But the pilot's prompt action had been successful and my experience was not repeated.

Not long afterwards Vera Ferris, who I had known since childhood, and I became engaged on her 21st birthday, which was celebrated with a party at which my old Savoy schoolmate Ray Noble entertained us for hours at the piano, much of the time with his own well-known compositions. The Ferris and the Middleton families had been friends for many years, my brother Wally playing water polo with Ernie and Cyril Ferris.

After another season of foreign cruising in Ranchi the ship was back on the Bombay run. I had replaced C.S. Cook as Third Officer and Mail Officer. After a number of voyages I applied for leave to do my twelve months Naval training, which was granted. The training involved a gunnery course at HMS Vivid at Devonport, a Torpedo course at HMS Defiant, moored in the Tamar and a Signals course at the Signal School at Portsmouth'.

I then joined the aircraft carrier 'Furious' for the remaining ten months of my training. This was very good value and I enjoyed it. I did a Junior Officer's Air course, flying from Furious and kept watches at sea on my own with Furious doing 25 knots

Rounding Lands End I once found the ship surrounded by the pilchard fishing fleet and had to carry out some rather exciting manoeuvres. It was after midnight and all Captain Henderson did was ring the bridge and ask if I was happy with the situation! strangely, I was.

The difference between the responsibility allowed to junior officers in the navy as compared to the merchant service always astonished me. Under the same circumstances in 'Ranchi' the Captain and a senior watchkeeper would both have been on the bridge and here was I with a 32,000 ton warship steaming at 25 knots in my charge, with an attendant destroyer close astern !

That autumn I started my flying course which was merely a familiarisation exercise with a little aerial navigation but quite fascinating for someone who had never flown before. Taking off from the deck was exciting and landing-on even more so. Looked at from a height the deck of 'Furious' looked tiny and I admired the skill of my pilot when we touched down smoothly.

After Christmas leave 'Furious' left with the rest of the Home Fleet for joint manoeuvres with the Mediterranean fleet, based on Gibraltar. Here I completed my flying course and also did a trip in a submarine doing some complicated underwater exercise. All very interesting. I left 'Furious' in March having completed my year's RNR training. I was given a wonderful send off at guest night the day before I left and still have a slowly disintegrating souvenir of the occasion. It was a great honour for an RNR Sublieutenant.

My passage home from Gib. was in the P&O 'Malwa' but as a passenger and still officially on leave I had no duties. On arriving home I went straight to a crammers and took my First Mate's ticket about three weeks later. I then reported back to Head Office and was appointed Third Officer of 'Rawalpindi' under the command of Captain Redhead. Our first trip was to China and Japan calling at all sorts of places en route, including Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Tsin Tau.

Once again the shipping industry was in recession and ships were being laid up. We did several Bombay trips and then took over the Bombay - Aden 'ferry', connecting with the outward and homeward bound Australia and China mail ships. Eventually it was decided to lay up 'Rawalpindi' in Bombay and as I was due for some six weeks leave I was told I could have a passage home and rejoin the ship in the Spring. This I did.

I joined the Morea in Bombay and had a lively and pleasant trip home. Lively because of two tea planters from Assam who certainly kept the ship alive. On leaving the ship in London we agreed to meet in the Silver Grill in Whitehall a day or two later. I duly arrived at the rendezvous but there was no sign of my planter friends. I enquired of the barmaid if two young men had been asking for me. She did not reply but nodded to someone behind me. This proved to be the bouncer and a moment later I was outside on the pavement. The bouncer kindly directed me to a nearby pub where he said I should find them if they had not already been thrown out. I tried the pub as suggested only to be bounced again, neatly and painlessly. So it went on all along the Strand, ending up at the Savoy Tavern where the two jokers were waiting to pick me up ! I don't think I ever saw them again after that day. Once was enough.

I found the shipping situation worse than when I left and a visit to my friend Mr. Acton of the Officer's Dept. of the P&O was not encouraging. He said officers were being stood off every other trip and my outlook for promotion was bleak as I was at the bottom of the Third Mate's list. He could not see any improvement in the near future and suggested that if I had any chance of a shore job I should take it. I told my friend Dick Daniel all this and shortly afterwards he said he had mentioned me to Cecil Notley of Harrods Advertising Dept. who needed a new copywriter. Dick told him I did a lot of writing and Notley said he would see me. I went along and got the job. The pay was pretty meagre pending my proving suitable but it was a job and I took it. It was of course a completely new and challenging experience. I dropped into it very easily and as it consisted of writing readable English I felt I could do it.

My colleagues in the Advt. Dept. at Harrods were all very pleasant and consisted of about equal numbers of male and female. I worked most of the time on 'Harrods News', a weekly magazine catalogue. This involved a continual rush to meet our printing deadline and meant that I spent a lot of time at the printers, a local (Brompton Road) firm, Hutchings and Crowsley. I soon picked up all the printing terms and got to know key members of the staff. This later affected my life considerably.

However my stay at Harrods was a fairly short one as Cecil Notley lost his job and it was clear that the new man was bringing a lot of his own people with him. As a result Dick Daniel suggested that I should join his firm, Daniel Studio, and start an advertising dept. there. He also gave me a useful increase in wages compared with my pittance from Harrods.

All this time I was living at home and still engaged to Vera Ferris. Financially marriage seemed some way off. Then, shortly after joining Daniel Studio, Dick had a bad motor accident.



This led to all sorts of trouble including a lung operation and eventually his death some years later but he was never really fit afterwards. It also meant that I had to take over other duties such as bookkeeping and calling on customers, most of them in the advertising depts. of the big stores. However, this did not all happen at once and in 1930 I married Vera and after a very splendid reception at the Priory Club in Acton we set off for our honeymoon at Salcombe. Here Vera had her first taste of dinghy sailing and I fear she did not like it much !

Next I got the idea of setting up a small printing press to do the many smaller jobs which came our way, particularly leaflets and other promotion literature for the many laundries and dry cleaners I had managed to get as clients. These came through the good offices of my friend George Garrod who ran a small cleaners and who branched out considerably.

I am a bit hazy as to what triggered off my next move but I decided to expand my printing business and left Daniel Studio to do so. My good friend Ernest Benson from midshipman days had been invalided from the navy as a result of falling down a hold in the submarine depot ship 'Cyclops' in which he sustained a bad fracture of the skull. He became interested in my printing venture and at my suggestion came into partnership with me. Our working capital consisted of the £50 each of us subscribed! Our first works was the basement of a music shop in Churchfield Rd. Acton on the opposite corner to Ferris Bros., my father-in-law's firm.

Our business expanded rapidly and from one Heidelberg platen and my original small platen machine we gradually increased our plant to 3 Heidelbergs (cost at that time about £400 each) and two vertical Miehles plus a fine new guillotine. Also lots of composing equipment. All. of course on HP. We got another £100 capital from my father and Godfather and later £250 from my very good friend, Harold Wesley who promptly cancelled the liability. We were soon employing a dozen or more people so our wages bill, which had to be met each week, was a difficult problem. We were, of course very much under capitalised and it was only by expanding rapidly that we managed to achieve the necessary cash flow. A dangerous, if not impossible way of running a business.

Then fate came to our aid ! One day Cecil Notley, who now had his own advertising agency, got in touch with me and said would I be interested in joining Hutchings and Crowsley as general manager ? I discussed the matter with Ben and we decided it was worth exploring the offer further. So Notley arranged a meeting and Leonard Hutchings, who was suffering from heart trouble, offered me the job at £500 a year - a reasonable salary in those days.

I had told Leonard Hutchings about my own firm - Lynton Press - and our difficulties from lack of capital. He at once said that if all went well - and I could do my job, I assumed - a merger might prove beneficial to both businesses. It really looked as if all our troubles were over. Ben brought in an old friend of his, Len Steed, to do the calling on customers and general rep. duties and it worked very well. We had earlier brought in Kathy Steed, Len's sister, to run our art dept. She was a godsend.

After about a year Leonard Hutchings told me he would have to spend less time on the business and I was appointed joint managing director on a salary of £800 a year and 1½% of the net profits. I was on the up !

But alas, that man Hitler got in the way as he marched into neighbouring countries while Britain and France wondered what to do - and what he would do next. One Saturday morning I was gardening or thinking about it when a telegram arrived telling me to report forthwith to HMS President, the HQ of the London Division RNVN, to which I belonged having transferred from the RNR in 1931 (the year Jill was born. Angela was born in 1934.)

Mine not to reason why etc. and having been brought up to obey orders I varied them to the extent of having lunch before I went. Arrived on board the ship, which lay alongside the embankment at the Temple (near Blackfriars bridge) I went straight to the Wardroom in which I found the Officer Instructor, Lt. Commander Harris. He immediately called to the steward for two large whiskies. I said, 'I don't drink whisky - certainly not at three o'clock in the afternoon.'

He said, 'You are going to need this one. You are flying to Singapore tonight !' We drank the whisky and I lit the cigarette he offered me. I had been a non-smoker for over a year. He went on to instruct me to go home, pack a suitcase (presumably for the duration of the war) and wait for a phone call from Northolt Airport which was conveniently situated a mile or so from my home,

No phone call came so we went to bed and at midnight the door bell rang and a telegraph boy handed me a telegram. This instructed me to report to the Sea Transport Officer at Southampton before noon for passage in SS Aquitania. We got up and I started unpacking the suitcase and packing a cabin trunk. At eight o'clock next morning I rang for a taxi, bade farewell to my wife and children - all of whom took it quite calmly - and departed for I did not know how long. Perhaps for ever ?

In the train from Waterloo to Southampton there were a number of naval officers masquerading as civilians, reading the Telegraph or Times and really looking just like city gents, which no doubt they were a few hours ago. I felt I was in good company. The ship, the largest I had ever been in, was inspected by CinC Portsmouth before sailing. This was the famous Ginger Boyle, whose illustrious ancestor was the Earl of Cork and Orrery. I found that there were about half a dozen RNVR officers on board, all from the London Division. I knew them all so we were quite a happy party, all things considered.

We sailed round about lunch time and we took the sumptuous meal prepared for the Atlantic passengers whose places we had taken. Off the Nab Tower we found our naval escort. Two 'R' class battleships and four destroyers. A colleague said he had no idea we were so valuable. It was certainly reassuring except for the fact that the Admiralty must have some knowledge of German forces at sea and that the first we might know of it would be a torpedo hitting our gallant vessel. Nothing of the sort occurred and we soon dropped into the normal shipboard life of passengers. We played all the usual deck games, swam in the below-decks swimming pool, drank at the verandah bar and played cards at night. On board was a unit of my father's old regiment, the Green Howards. I played solo with some of the officers and found them easy meat, which helped my finances.

There was the usual Biscay sea in the Bay and although it did not affect 'Acquitania' or the battlewagons the destroyers had to ease down. Their gyrations and plunges were astonishing. Having served in destroyers I knew what it was like on board.

Approaching Gibraltar the news came through that Mr Chamberlain had returned from his visit to Hitler triumphantly waving a piece of paper and proclaiming 'Peace in our time'. Acquitania took no notice and went on to Port Said. Here our soldiers were disembarked and the RNVR contingent hired cars and went off to see the pyramids. Two days later we left for home via Malta, having picked up a number of nurses, a fact which enlivened the voyage and was the cause of one officer being publicly debagged. Apart from that the trip home was rather dull; a complete anti-climax.

Nothing much seemed to have happened in my absence. My family had taken it all in their stride and continued to do so. We all realised that this was only a breathing space. Back at H & C I soon dropped into the routine and business was naturally patchy. Even Harrods was watching points. I spent two or three nights a week on 'President' helping to deal with the influx of volunteers, of which there was a steady stream.

However, things were also moving at H&C and I sensed a change of attitude in Leonard Hutchings. He several times referred to the effect of war on the business and whether they would be able to keep going. I am not quite sure but I have an idea he also suggested that I should surrender the qualifying shares I was allotted as managing director. It was a case of battening down hatches ! I also heard through Notley that he was making some pointed remarks suggesting that I was using H&C facilities to bolster Lynton Press but I got an early appointment to a destroyer and could not do much about this underhand business at the time. In fact there was a general mobilisation of the navy in August 1939 and I never returned to H&C. I received no salary from the firm from that moment on and the business disappeared on Leonard Hutchings dying. His son Bob was lost flying in the RAF early in the war. So that was the end of Middleton as a Master Printer.

On mobilisation proper my Singapore appointment came through again. My mother, who had been bedridden with arthritis for some years was very frail and in hospital. My father, without my knowledge, went to the Admiralty and asked if the appointment to Singapore could be delayed as my mother was dying. The Admiralty agreed at once and I got a temporary appointment to HMS 'Lucifer', the naval base at Swansea. My job was as one of a team of reserve officers boarding ships as they arrived to ensure it was safe for them to be allowed to enter the docks. Boarding ships in all weathers from the pilot cutter taught me a thing or two and about a month after the outbreak of war I got into some of the first action. First I spotted some ship's lifeboats driving towards the shore at Mumbles Head. We found they were full of Lascars, some injured and all frightened. My P&O time and knowledge of Lascaribat, the Lascar language, came in handy as I was able to establish that their ship was the 'Marwarri' and had been torpedoed some miles to the southward. We towed the boats to safety and immediate help for the wounded and then steamed away to the southward and eventually found the 'Marwarri' still afloat and completely abandoned. We got her in tow and made slowly for Oystermouth bay near Mumbles. We had one of the Swansea pilots on board and he picked the best spot for beaching. It was as simple as that - except for the obvious feeling that whatever attacked the ship might still be around. We hope the enemy would consider us not worth a torpedo. In fact it later became known that it was no torpedo but a magnetic mine which crippled the 'Marwarri'.

The Captain of HMS 'Lucifer' was extremely pleased with our success and made a glowing report to Flag Officer in Charge at Cardiff. I rather enjoyed the whole thing.

For some reason I cannot remember I was on Duty afloat again next day. We had dealt with a couple of ships when the signal station on Mumbles Head (known as The Tutt) signalled us to say that there was a ship stopped and apparently abandoned ten mile south of the Head. We set off at once and found the ship to be the 'Loch Goil', anchored and certainly abandoned. With one of the Swansea pilots still with us I went on board and we found that there was about six feet of water in the holds but there was no sign of damage such as a torpedo would have caused. We came to the conclusion that she had been mined and that the shock of the explosion had let go the anchor. With no steam available it was impossible to weigh anchor and it was not possible to let go the shackle holding the inboard end of the cable as it was six feet under water.

The skipper of the pilot boat/examination vessel 'Roger Beck' was an enterprising chap and immediately suggested to me that they should cut the anchor cable with a hack saw ! As the cable was about 2" in diameter and each link about 10 inches long it was clearly going to be a long job but I agreed. He asked me if I would take over the 'Roger Beck' and he and the engineer went on board with two hacksaws and a new pack of a dozen blades.

By this time it was dark and alongside the darkened and deserted vessel and steaming gently in the vicinity when it got a bit too rough to stay there we could not help wondering whether there were more mines in the vicinity or possibly a U-boat watching it all through her periscope.

After something over an hour with the skipper and his engineer working in turns they cut through one link but the weight of the cable closed it up again. They then realised they had chosen the wrong part of the link and that the other end would have been better. Here the weight of the cable would have tended to open it - so they started again. With only a dimmed torch to work by the whole operation seemed eerie. Sometime in the early hours they completed the job and away went the cable with a rush. By then we had a tow rope on board from 'Roger Beck' and having got the now exhausted men on board, gradually took the weight of the ship and turned her towards Swansea.

Sometime during the operation a minesweeper with an expert from the School of Torpedoes and Mining arrived and kindly acted as communication link with NOIC Swansea. Not long after we had got the ship under way, tugs arrived from Swansea, much to the annoyance of our pilot who had visions of a large salvage claim as no doubt had the skipper. Myself and a Royal Marine guard were the only service personnel on board and thought it most improbable that we should rank for salvage.

With our pilot I inspected the holds and it appeared that little or no more water had been taken on board. So on the pilot's advice I passed a signal to Swansea asking for permission to dock the casualty. This was promptly refused so we instructed the tugs to beach her in Oystermouth bay near Mumbles. This is where she lay when Vera and the children arrived to take up residence with me at Belgrave Court, Sketty, where I had rented a tiny flat.

I met the family at Swansea station when they arrived and was somewhat taken aback to see Angela had a very spotty face which Vera later told me was due to being bitten by Harvester bugs. Alas, this was not so and very shortly afterwards Jill developed the same thing which was promptly diagnosed as chicken pox by the local doctor. Although Angela was quite unaffected by her version Jill was really very poorly. As soon as both girls were pronounced free of infection they started school at a convent school just across the road.

They seemed to get on well here and liked the nuns. Angela, however, was more affected by the religious atmosphere than Jill and was constantly saying 'Hail Marys'. She also learned the Welsh national anthem which she was fond of singing.

Our time together at Swansesa was very pleasant. Everyone was very friendly and we gave a Christmas party to officers from Lucifer. Vera's parents came down for Christmas, our turkey being cooked by the local baker who provided the service for some hundreds of birds. Unfortunately the car I had been lent ran out of petrol halfway up the hill to Belgrave Court and I finished the journey with a hot turkey in my arms !

I had opted for second leave period and we all proceeded to Acton just after Boxing Day. Soon after we arrived came a phone call to say a new appointment had arrived for me as Flag Lieutenant to Vice-Admiral Sir James Pison, Senior British Naval Officer Suez Canal Area, and to report to the Admiralty on 9 January. So back to Swansea went Vera and I, packed our belongings, returned the hire purchase furniture (for which I got very little) and returned to Acton again accompanied this time with our cocker spaniel 'Nina'. Incidentally, I had shipped my half-stripe in September so the financial outlook was a little better. (Not much, as my pay only went up from 17 shillings a day to 24/-.)

My last few days in England were very hectic. I had to have anti-typhoid jabs which were very painful and I ran a high temperature. My mother had died in November and I had leave to go to her funeral but I had a lot of farewells to make.

In fact I don't remember much of those last few days in England. I didn't even have time to worry about my new job, into which I was being thrown at the deep end. I assumed I had got the job as a result of my having requalified in signals a couple of years before and had got first class passes at both of my spells at the signal school at Portsmouth. Almost before I realised just what was happening I got my travelling instructions. These were train to Southampton and troop ferry to Cherbourg. Troop train to Marseilles where I was to join the Troopship 'Leicestershire' for passage to Port Said. This trip was interesting and a story in its own right. My travelling companion was a 2½ (Lt.Commander) on his way to join HMS 'Gloucester' as navigator. I fear he lost his life in the action for Crete. He was a charming chap but stood no nonsense and put the Train Major firmly in his place. This individual was a retired officer probably promoted to do the job and very inclined to treat naval officers as if they were private soldiers.

On board I was a bit disconcerted to find the ship was dry, as indeed all troop ships were at that time, but I found that the Third Mate was an old Pangbournian and ship's officers were not subject to the TT order. It was a pleasant voyage.

At Port Said I was met by Lieut. Bobby Roberts who I was relieving. He had an appointment as signals officer of one of HM ships. He seemed very keen to get back to sea and in due course, after introducing me to the Admiral, gave me a conducted tour of his domain and a lot of very useful advice including how to handle the cypher staff - all female, with the wife of the Admiral's secretary, a Paymaster Commander, in charge.

The Admiral, affectionately known as 'Jamie' Pipon, was very friendly and showed no concern at the thought of my being his Flag Lieutenant. He right away gave me precise details of my job and responsibilities. He said you will live here at Admiralty house and be responsible for dealing with invitations to guests and fending off importunate callers. You will eat, drink and smoke at my expense in the house. I shall not expect you to do so outside ! All this with a smile on his face. In fact with a certain amount of further tuition from the Admiral I soon found my feet, although I did not find the head of the cypher room easy to deal with. Even so we remained good friends and I was always asked to their parties.

At this time, of course, Italy was not in the war and the Mediterranean was quiet and peaceful and social life at Ismailia was pleasant and lively.

However, after a week or two the Admiral said to me, 'I have been considering your stay here. I expected them to send me an older man. We have very little in common and it occurred to me you would be happier to live at the pension with other officers nearer your age.' At first I was a bit taken aback as I felt I was not measuring up but could not argue, of course.

At the time of my arrival the climate at Ismailia was not unlike that of England in early Spring and a bit depressing at times. In spite of the fact that we were not in an active war zone I had plenty to do as there was a lot of traffic through the canal and I was in constant communication with the Canal Company. The Admiral had established friendly relations with the Heads of Departments of which I remember M.Hommery ( Chef de Transit ?) and M.Lucas who had a very attractive English wife, always referred to when speaking to me as 'The Yorkshire Lass'. I later formed the opinion that some of the lipstick on the Admiral's white mess jacket was hers. He undoubtedly admired her. In fact - nil nisi bonum ! - in the course of time I always made sure that I had a clean mess jacket for the Admiral when we went to parties. Perhaps that remark will give an idea of the wide range of a Flag Lieutenant's duties.

All this , of course, before Italy came into the war although in fact as the Admiral had to keep on good terms with the Egyptians, the Canal Company and other service chiefs in the area, plus visiting politicians and the like at all times. From my point of view I was sitting at the feet of the mighty and as a result probably had a better idea of how the war was going than most people. A long way from home and with my brain constantly striving to keep up with a completely different situation from anything previously experienced, home and my family took on a faintly unreal aspect, perhaps due to some extent to the fact that there was a very real prospect that I should never see them again.

There was a United Services Club at Nefisha, a small lagoon off Lake Timsah, and here one could hire large sailing craft known as Bordeaux, no doubt from their place of origin. There was a stable and riding school near the town and horses could be hired by the hour for a reasonable sum. There were two open air cinemas in the town, performances commencing about nine o'clock at night and finishing sometime between twelve and one am. There were plenty of sandy beaches near Ismailia and when the sun started to warm things up, late night bathes were popular. The town was very cosmopolitan as the Canal Company employed people from many nations.



Shortly before Italy entered the war, Admiral Pipon's daughter Penelope arrived at Port Said in the P&O 'Strathmore' and I took the Admiral's car to meet her. The Captain of 'Strathmore' was Linden, who had been Chief Officer of 'Ranchi' when I was her Third Officer. We had a short but very friendly chat. I think he was somewhat surprised to find me as Flag Lieutenant to Admiral Pipon as he thought I had given up the sea about seven years before.

I got Penelope safely home to Admiralty House where she was reunited with her father. Not long after this, after I had shown the Admiral the signal log, he said, 'Penelope would like you to return to live with us as she thinks I shall be dull company'. I was pleased to think I was returning to full duties as Major Domo and Pen and I became firm friends although I was nearly twice her age.

Italy entered the war and started dropping magnetic mines in the Canal - and elsewhere occasionally. With much more signal traffic my job got busier and busier. It was full of incident - as for instance the time when I came back from a brief ride and as I walked along the wide hall I got a quick glimpse of Admiral Cunningham, CinC Mediterranean Fleet, talking to Jamie. As I passed the open door of the sittingroom I heard Admiral Cunningham say, 'Who was that, James?'. To which Jamie replied, 'That was my Flag Lieutenant. Dashing young fellow, isn't he?'. But this is supposed to be a short, short story and if you wish to learn more of my fascinating time at Ismailia you will have to read Book II of my story, 'Simple Seaman'.

Then came a nasty shock. A signal was received from the Admiralty to say my wife had developed peritonitis and was on the danger list. Owing to the state of the war, the Mediterranean being closed and aircraft not available it would not be possible for me to be sent home at present and that regular bulletins would be sent. Vera remained on the danger list for some weeks and it was clear that she was not expected to live, but she was tough and she did. However, as soon as it was possible for me to get a passage home, Jamie asked the CinC for a replacement for me and a young Lieutenant duly arrived.

After farewells to the Admiral and Pen and all the staff of Navy Office at Ismailia I took the train to Cairo and collected the necessary visas to my passport as I would be travelling as a civilian through neutral countries. I met two old friends from Ismailia in Cairo and had rather an alcoholic night there and joined a flying boat for the journey down the Nile to Khartum the next day. The flight home via Lagos, Lisbon and Shannon was quite an experience. I was really seeing the world.

We crossed the south-west corner of Ireland just as it got daylight and in the early sunshine it really looked the Emerald Isle. At Shannon Airport we all went through a farcical check by Immigration. Farcical because it was obvious that we were all British service personnel, the RAF contingent carrying their great coats and all provided with passports alleging that they were engineers. The Irish official in charge got a bit bored and asked the last man, a young pilot with an arm off at the elbow, what sort of engineer he was. This completely floored the young man who had not given the matter a thought. After a long hesitation he stammered out, 'Oh, I screw up nuts and bolts and things.' The official sighed, 'Very interesting,' he said in tired tones.

From Shannon we were conducted to the Adare Arms hotel where we enjoyed a substantial breakfast, after which we all climbed into coaches and had an interesting trip through the countryside to Dublin. From Dublin airport we flew to Whitchurch airport near Bristol. Here I was promptly put in the cooler by an officious intelligence office who discovered in my baggage some letters from Admiral Pison to his wife and the Admiralty. This unpleasant man pointed out that it was a crime to carry letters personally and that I must remain in custody while he waited for instructions from his HQ. This did not come for some hours and when I was released (without an apology) I had missed the last train to Worcester, the family being at Tenbury Wells as were my in-laws.

Not to be beaten I made some enquiries and found that there was an all-night train to Worcester for munition workers on which I was able to thumb a lift. The workers were all, or nearly all, female and it was not a dull journey. Arrived at Worcester I again enquired as to possible ways of getting to Tenbury Wells at five in the morning. I was introduced to a postman loading his van who kindly offered to take me, but said he would have to put me in the back of the van with some mail bags over me as he had to go to the GPO to collect some more mail.

We then set off and having moved to a seat in front with the driver I was interested to note that we seemed to spend much time delivering bags and other articles to many farms. These did not appear to have passed through the post in the usual way.

Arrived at Tenbury at about 6.30am I banged on the door of the shop over which Vera had an apartment of sorts. A moment later a fair haired little girl I took to be Jill let me in with a quite casual, 'Hallo Daddy.' and soon put me right with a grin, 'I'm Angela.' I don't think I said, 'How you've grown.'

At that time of day a reunion, pleasant as it was after nearly two years apart, was a quiet but none the less happy affair. But I was not so happy about the conditions in which my family was living although they seemed unconcerned. I felt that Vera's family and my own might have helped her more than they did, although it is probable that they had no idea of how she was living. This and her serious illness may well have had a lasting effect on her health.

During this first leave I had to make a visit to Lady Pipon at Plymouth and to see my father and sisters. So time went very quickly and my appointment to the anti-submarine school at Campbeltown arrived and I was off again. I was sad at leaving Vera and the girls so soon.

The appointment was not only for the course but also in command of an Admiralty anti-submarine and minesweeping trawler and as Senior Officer of a group of similar vessels. This was due no doubt to my having done a long minesweeping course in peace time. As Senior Officer of a group I was like a little admiral with his own fleet ! Almost...

My journey to Campbeltown was a marathom ! A long slow train journey to Glasgow on which we had long delays for some reason with the result that when we arrived at Wemyss bay the steamer for Campbeltown had already left. Eventually we were all put on a coach and at 3.0pm commenced the long journey by road. We had good views of Loch Lomond and climbed the famous 'Rest and be thankful' hill arriving at Inverary at 10pm in the dark. It was midnight when we got to C'town but a kindly Wren was waiting up and showed me to my room. 'Breakfast is at eight,' she said.

The course was excellent and really taught us all something about handling Asdic and submarine hunting in general. I met lot of interesting people including a RN commander who had been in submarines previously.

Leaving C'town our steamer had to contend with thick fog all the way to Glasgow. Except when we went alongside jetties I saw nothing so I guess the skipper did it by ear. The journey to Hull where I was to take over my vessel 'Sluna' was another marathon. There were no sleepers so I stretched out on one of the seats in my otherwise unoccupied compartment. Sometime in the early hours the guard looked in and I asked when he expected to arrive at Hull. 'No idea sir,' he said. 'We are the other side of the country at present. Bombed all night. You slept well.'

'Sluna' was not due to commission for some weeks so I wrote to Vera and suggested she should come and join me for a few days.

My digs at Hull - in fact at Kirkella - were extremely comfortable and I was sure a visit would make a welcome break from Tenbury Wells which was not a very exciting place. The evening she was due to arrive there was a mining raid in the Humber going on and very noisy it was. At the station to meet her I wondered how I was going to find her as it was in complete darkness without a light of any kind. Her train came in and passengers started to come off the platform the ticket collector having a very dim blue light to work by. It just about illuminated a ticket. All I could do was to stand by him saying 'Vera' at intervals. This invoked a variety of remarks from passengers. But in due course Vera grabbed me and seemed more astonished than frightened by the crescendo of noise

Arrived at my digs my hosts - I wish I could remember their name - had an excellent supper of roast beef waiting, plus a variety of small Yorkshire puddings served with just the gravy as a first course. The raids went on for most of the night and I think that Vera began to regret coming. Next day I showed her round Sluna which was now lying alongside in the docks. It being a Sunday we went for a walk in the afternoon which was enlivened by some urchins firing catapults at a tall feather in Vera's hat. I caught one of the lads who was surprised and chastened. Altogether, though, it was a very pleasant visit.

After a series of passing out trials with the builders on board we got our sailing orders which were to proceed to anchor at Spurn and join a north bound convoy escorts at dawn. That night there was another mining raid and we heard some splashes in our vicinity. The convoy duly appeared and we steamed out of the river to join them. First one, then another, mine exploded a short distance away which made me comment 'So much for our de-gaussing !'. (The anti-magnetic mine protection given to all ships.)

Our first call was at Port Edgar, near Edinburgh, where we lay alongside in what were the destroyer pens in my midshipman days. Here we carried out sweeping trials at sea for some time and then got orders to go to Methil, near the mouth of the firth, and pick up some LCTs (Landing Ship Tank) and convoy them to Aberdeen. Arrived off Aberdeen with another trawler in company there was a big sea running and we got a signal -Port Closed, proceed to Scapa Flow. This was all very well but I only had charts to Aberdeen !(In fact the LCTs were not allowed to sail from Methil owing to a bad weather forecast.)

The voyage from Aberdeen to Scapa was full of incident but I have to be firm and not include them here. (See 'Simple Seaman Part One for details !.)

I am afraid I disobeyed orders and did not go into Scapa as half the fleet was there and I decided there would be too much red tape there. As an excuse I said we must have fresh water urgently and was going into Thurso (Scrabster) to get it. This was approved and I took fresh water and proceeded to Tobermory, my ultimate destination. I have always had a healthy respect for the Pentland firth where the tidal stream runs at 9 knots at times. This produces the effect that the small islands in the firth are all steaming madly, with long white wakes.

Tobermory was the home of 'Western Isles', where all new - and some old - escort vessels are put through the hoop by an ex-Admiral now serving as a Commodore.. He had a fearsome reputation for make-or break tactics and was known to board a pupil ship in the middle of the night, sound the alarm gongs and send a boat away. We came through the hoop successfully in spite of having a fire in our magazine which frightened the life out of me. But that, too, is another story.

After a three weeks stay at Tobermory we sail one evening to 'Good Luck' signals from the Commodore and, believe it or not, congratulations. Our destination was Gourock on the Clyde. We had an interesting passage through some inner channels and the Sound of Islay. Our stay on the Clyde was not very happy as the Staff Officer Operations for the Admiral at Greenock was a bit officious. Seeing he was a lieutenant RN I outranked him with my half-stripe in spite of being RNVR. During one disagreement the Admiral himself came in the office and said indignantly, 'How dare you talk to my Staff Officer like that?'. I was wearing a naval raincoat so he could not see my rank. I took it off and said that as his senior officer I thought he might have been more polite. The Admiral merely said 'Oh,' and left. I was happy to leave the Clyde. But we did a trip to Belfast and back before proceeding to Milford Haven in convoy.

Apart from endeavouring to sink a floating mine by rifle fire the trip was rather dull. Shortly before arriving at Milford Haven a Hunt class destroyer passed us bound north. She arrived back in the Haven a few hours later having been hit by a bomb from an enemy aircraft. She had a considerable number of dead and wounded. How the German aircraft missed our convoy is a mystery. That is how things go in war time. You are either lucky or you are not lucky.

A gale followed us into harbour and having made fast to a buoy we lay there for two days without any communication with the shore. One night the Quartermaster on our gangway came to me and said, 'Trawler 'Pearl' has hailed us, sir, asking if she may lay alongside as they cannot pick up a buoy in this weather.' Normal seamanlike precaution said, 'No'.

But I assumed they had had a day at sea in the gale and the thought of having to keep under way all night would have hurt. I turned out the Coxswain and some hands and told him to get all the fenders he could muster on our lee side. I then hailed 'Pearl' and told him he could lie alongside my port side but must use every fender. And if either vessel sustained damage as a result I shall say I did not give permission ! Back came a signal, Many thanks. You're a brick ! There was no damage and we became firm friends for the short time we were in company.

The weather improved and we got orders to sail and rv. with a convoy north of Lundy Island. So with 'Pearl' in company we made our way to the meeting place. There was a very big swell running up the estuary and we remained hove to awaiting the convoy from Cardiff which was over an hour late; climbing over the swells in a switchback ride. 'Pearl' signalled, 'We can see your Asdic dome is still attached !' This meant that nearly half the hull was out of the water aswent over the top of the swells.

The convoy arrived in due courseand the commodore ordered us to take station at the head of the inshore column. It soon got dark and owing to the convoy being late the period for which the shore lights had been ordered had passed. As we passed between Lundy and the mainland the column on the side of the island decided that they needed more room so that we found our column having to steer closer to the shore, with the result we were getting perilously near the rocks. With the massive great hull of a large merchant ship looming out of the darkness nearly on top of us I felt anything but comfortable.

However, we survived, and eventually arrived at Plymouth where 'Sluna' was detached and became under the orders of Captain M/S and was berthed in Millbay Dock. Plymouth was being regularly bombed at that time and 'Sluna' having thirty or more depth charges on deck was considered to highly explosive in the small dock and we were under orders to proceed to sea on receipt of an air raid warning. This made life a bit hard as we were usually sweeping all day and often had to sail just as we would normally be giving shore leave.

But I enjoyed the sweeping with my little fleetof four minesweepers which were rather a mixed bag and two were real fishing trawlers with skippers in command while the third was Norwegian. None of them was very good at obeying orders and I had to get very stern with them at times. We swept from Plymouth to Dartmouth one day and back the next. Then Plymouth to Fowey the next day. We did one long sweep from Plymouth to half way across West bay where we met other sweepers from Portland. We were all right on course. Not always easy with sweeps running.

Another little job we had was to sweep round the Eddystone Lighthouse after a report from the keeper that an object had been seen to fall into the sea close at hand. It was dusk and they did not see what type of aircraft it came from. The difficulty was to sweep really close to the rock without getting caught up on it. We did not find a mine.

I had a very pleasant Christmas leave at Tenbury with the family and in-laws but had to return to the ship on Boxing Day. catching a train from Worcester, once more in the company of munition workers. Sluna had to go in dock for some minor repairs to a sweep davit, then it was back to sweeping and a night shoot. Everything was running smoothly for some time when there was a bolt from the blue. Sluna was ordered to join the force going to the relief of Madagascar. I applied for change of ship as I had already served nearly two years abroad and my wife was not yet fully recovered. I was released at once and got, not another ship but appointment as Experimental Officer on the staff of Admiral Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations. It was certainly 'a sea change'. I am not sure whether I managed to get to Tenbury before joining C.O.H.Q. but if I did it was not for long.

And then here I was in a completely different world again. Not only that but I was in at the deep end again, a one man department dealing with all sorts of ideas, many of them quite Alice in Wonderland in design. They ranged from a proposal to build a landing strip in mid-Atlantic from sawdust and ice and a suggestion from an elderly lady for landing troops on an enemy shore by providing them with parachutes and catapulting them from a large machine based on the Roman one for hurling boulders ! However, from the word go it was the re-entry to the continent which was the driving factor and in particular getting men, tanks and vehicles ashore.

However, I was not the head of my own department for long as CCO brought his friend Tom Hussey and his experimental outfit up from Southsea where they had been operating. Captain Hussey became Director of Experimental and Operational Requirements and I became his second in command on the naval side. I liked Tom Hussey and we got on well together, so much so that he soon left many jobs to me which were by rights, his. One being to take the chair in his absence at high-powered committees in spite of the fact that I was the most junior person there !

COHQ contained many members of high society a number of whom had titles. In Tom's team was Lord Antrim, serving as a Lt.Com. and another was Sir Malcolm Campbell who became a very good friend of mine. I have kept several letters from him. So I kept very busy and found the job fascinating and early in 1943 I was rewarded with a brass hat as full commander.

My number one job became Pluto (Pipe Line Under The Ocean) so much so that I found myself being referred to as 'Pluto' and in fact that it soon became the case that I was the only one who really knew anything about it. Pluto brought me in touch with many of the top people in the oil business one of whom was John Jameson, a managing director of Anglo-Iranian (Now BP). After the war ended John Jameson offered me the job of Personal Assistant to him but said I would not be able to start with Anglo-Iranian until 18 months time when his present PA would be promoted to another job. For a number of reasons I had to decline the offer, one of the reasons being that I needed a job right away as H & C had folded up.

Soon after I joined COHQ the Dieppe raid took place and I was horrified when I heard the details beforehand. It seemed to me that it could only result in wholesale slaughter or capture of our troops, which in the event was exactly what happened. There was a bad mistake somewhere.

My time at COHQ was hectic and I was continually flying about the country, in fact, and usually worked a twelve hour day. As D-day approached things got more and more hectic until I was suddenly seconded to a detachment of Royal Engineers dealing with Pontoon Causeways, a device for landing vehicles - and troops - dry shod. The CRE was Colonel David Fayle and once more I found I had been very fortunate in the man I had to act for as naval liaison officer. We became very good friends and I was very sad when he died shortly after the end of the war. I found myself taking part in the Normandy landings and as, on the naval side I worked under the direction of Rear-Admiral Creasey who was CSO to Admiral Ramsey, Naval Commander-in-Chief for the landings, I was frequently at Northwick House where all the top brass had their offices.

After Normandy I felt that my job at COHQ would be very dull and told Tom Hussey I would like a change. He was not very pleased but agreed to tell CCO and I soon received appointment to the staff of Admiral Baillie-Grohman who was to lead the naval party in to Kiel to take over the German navy when surrender occurred. I attended a series of lectures on our duties which were interesting but turned out to be academic in my case. Every day we were treated to a number of buzz-bomb attacks which I found somewhat disturbing ! Owing to the advance of the Allied forces coming to a halt with the onset of winter Kiel seemed a long way off. In fact I never saw it as a new appt. arrived and I soon found I was on my way to Moscow. No one could say I had a dull war.

The journey consisted of a train to Thurso, Destroyer from Scapa Flow to Polyanyoe by N. Russian convoy and train to Moscow.



It was mid-winter and not the most agreeable time to plough the seas round Bear Island. The Captain of 'Caesar', the destroyer I was in, was senior officer of close escort. I was of course senior in rank to any of the ship's officers. Captain Brewer asked me if I would take over the signals branch which consisted almost entirely of dealing with cyphers wwith which, from my flag lieutenant days, I was fairly conversant. This helped while away the time and also kept me in touch with what was going on. As we got further north we only had about a couple of hours of rather poor daylight. To see the aircraft taking off from the heaving decks of our two Woolworth carriers into low clouds made me wonder how they were ever going to get back again. They were very brave young men.

Of the enemy we saw and heard very little until we were approaching the Kola Inlet and our destination, Polyarnoe. Then there were submarine echoes all round and depth charges going off at intervals but no casualties. Entering the Inlet there was a clear sky with Orion like a great silver banner in the sky to the south. We docked at midnight after nine days at sea; and did everyone seek a welcome bed at last ? They did not ! A singsong with Captain Brewer at the piano commenced and we were visited by officers from most of the other close escorts. I was out on my feet.

Next day I dined with Admiral Egerton, Senior British NO at Polyarnoe. Captain Brewer was also a guest. It was an interesting meal and the conversation very informative. Caesar and the other escorts sailed next day to rendezvous with the homeward convoy from Archangel. I was on the jetty to wave farewell and cast off Caesar's lines. One of the escorts was torpedoed shortly after sailing but managed to return safely for repairs.

In company with Victor Tate, senior British interpreter in Moscow, I left next day by launch for Murmansk, some miles up the river. It was quite a long journey and quite dark when we got to Murmansk. My stomach had been playing up after the round of farewell drinks at Polyarnoe and all I wanted now was bed. I asked to be excused from supper and went to my room in the Intourist hotel. This place was full of marble pillars and looked rather like a museum. The loos were all out of order as nobody ever flushed them, My room was infested with bed bugs, an army of which advanced across the floor of the room towards my bed. The slaughter was beastly.

Next day, after a breakfast of sausage, cheese and red caviar we boarded our train just as it was beginning to get light. Victor and I shared a compartment in a 'soft' coach which was quite comfortable except for the fact that the lights kept going out

The journey seemed endless, the train never exceeding much more than 15mph. It was all very sociable, people dropping in to sample our tea. A soldier on leave fired salutes with a pistol and broke the window of his compartment. I suppose he had to freeze for the rest of his journey. Ours took five days and we arrived in Moscow about midnight. We were met by Captain Arthur Cox from the British Military Mission who drove us to the Admiral's flat in the Arbat. Admiral Archer welcomed us and did not seem surprised to see me. I decided to leave the matter of his asking for me to a later date when I knew him better. I was then taken to the flat which I was to share with Major Ted Croft, Arthur Cox and Squadron-Leader Boris Trapp. I had a large room to myself and in general everything was very comfortable.

Next day after breakfast we drove to the HQ of the Mission in the Ulitza Kharitonofsky, which was opposite the Russian Admiralty. Here I was introduced to the other members of the staff and shown my office which was large enough for six.

I shall not go into my stay in Moscow in detail - all that is in the second part of 'Simple Seaman' entitled 'War' - but will just add a certain amount of local colour. In spite of the continuous grey skies and generally sombre aspect, my life in Moscow was very entertaining. A weekly meeting with the Russians on naval matters and contact with the Americans. Lots of official parties; those with the Russians rarely hilarious, others with members of other embassies often incomprehensible to me as every language under the sun would be in use, sometimes several at once. The ballet was entrancing and as it did not need any knowledge of the language to enjoy it, it was very popular. I was kept very busy, made a lot of new friends and made several expeditions outside the city, including one to Zagorsk, which was the closest the Germans got to Moscow.

Christmas was celebrated in traditional fashion at the Mission and the New Year welcomed in naval fashion by ringing sixteen bells - eight for the old and eight for the new - by the youngest member of the staff.

Early in the new year I joined a party bound for Odessa. Three British ships carrying repatriated Russian troops were due to arrive and would embark British service men, ex-prisoners of war and others released by the advancing Russians. Ted Croft was responsible for the army side; I had to deal with the ships. For more about Odessa see my (unpublished) book 'Mrs. M. This was another fascinating episode in my war service.

While in Odessa I received a telegram informing me that my father had died. I was very sad. He was a wonderful father.

The whole of our time in Odessa was pretty hectic. I spent most of my time on board the ships or trying to persuade the Inflat manager to provide pilots to move the ships or some other nautical requirement. We all lived in the London Hotel in which the plumbing was suspect or not functioning and it usually took two hours to serve our evening meal. In fact everything was so unreal we might have been on another planet.

On the ships arrival all the troops were fallen in and harangued by a General who told them they would be sent to the front and be marched across the minefields to clear them for advancing troops. In other words to their death. The British and other ex-POWs had been arriving at intervals, some of them with wives collected during their stay. The Russians would not allow the wives to depart. In general it was a difficult and at times distressing job for the Mission team and I am sure our success was entirely due to Ted Croft. He was diplomacy personified and got on extremely well with the Russians. He was also kind enough to say something of the sort in his report to Admiral Archer about me.

We were eventually relieved by a special party from Britain and returned to Moscow. It was nice to be home !

Almost immediately details of the Yalta conference began to trickle in. With Churchill and Roosevelt attending with their horde of aides there were all sorts of problems about security etc. One of the snags was that the air strip at Yalta had four feet of snow on it, as reported by Boris Trapp who went to inspect. Another was a minefield in the Black sea which London thought was inadequately marked. I brought this up at my weekly meeting at the Otdel. The Russian Admiral present produced a chart with the area of the minefield pencilled in. 'We will soon put that right,' he said and produced an indiarubber and proceeded to rub out the minefield. 'There,' he said, 'Now it is safe.' In other words it was only there in theory. At least I hoped so.

In due course Admiral Archer, with Stuart Spittle and Victor Tate, left for Yalta but not until after a struggle with the Russians who did everything possible to delay him. I remained in sole charge of the naval side of the mission. The Russians did not like this saying it was infra dig for their Admiral to have to deal with a mere commander. Archer put this right by promoting me to Acting Head of the Naval Mission after which I was solemnly addressed as Admiral Middleton. It rather suited me !

Some time later Mrs Churchill arrived in Moscow, a guest of the Soviet Republic as Head of the British Red Cross which had donated millions of pounds worth of equipment.

When Admiral Archer returned to Moscow he brought with him a number of others who had attended the conference. Among them was General Laycock, CCO, Anthony Head and Lord Lovat, all of whom I knew.

I could continue with stories about Russia for a long time - but not here. For further details see 'War'. Eventually the very drear Russian winter drew to a close and suddenly it was spring !As snow came cascading down from roofs bringing, so it was said, an occasional body stored there in order to draw the rations. Before the snow went I did some skiing and had a spectacular tumble. So many members of the Mission had done the like that the Admiral put a stop to the sport.

I think my reference to Mrs. Churchill earlier was out of place because she was in Russia when the Germans capitulated. Shortly after this momentous occasion my job came to an end and as Mrs. C. was soon to leave for home I asked the 3rd. Secretary who acted as her aide if he thought she might give me a lift in the Prime Minister's plane. I think he admired my nerve but said he would put it to her. At an Embassy party later he took me and introduced me to her. She was very friendly and said she understood I would like to accompany her on the journey home. I replied that that was so and she said she would be pleased to take me.

So I came home in state enjoying a calm flight with clear blue skies allowing a splendid aerial view of the Ukraine, the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmora. We landed at Malta about 2000 that evening. Mrs. C was at once driven off to Government House and the other passengers, which besides myself included Brigadier Hill, Murray Mathieson, the actor, and David Floyd who later wrote articles on Russia for the Daily Telegraph, were all taken to the Officer's Mess and suitably entertained. I produced the programme for 'Swan Lake' at the Bolshoi the night before and it was proudly displayed on the notice board.

We took off again about 0200 and at 0800 next morning were flying over Paris. Our pilot sent a message to me asking if I would like to go forward and sit in the co-pilot's seat to see my house as we circled Northolt Airfield. Of course I did but never managed to see 21 Highgrove Way. We were met by the Russian Ambassador and Lord Chatfield, Mr Churchill arriving five minutes later, shaking his fist at our pilot for having arrived early !

A car with a WAAF driver took me home. At the end of our road my daughter Jill was waiting at the bus stop. I asked my driver to stop just as the bus arrived. Jill waved, said 'Hallo, Daddy, 'Must go' and was off. My driver said, 'She's a cool one'

However, the war was not over yet and the 2nd Sea Lord's office didn't allow me more than a couple of weeks leave before offering me a choice of two or three appointments and of these I chose that of Commanding Officer of HMS 'Northney III', a Combined Operations camp on Hayling Island.

This was a transit camp with a continually changing population and I had little to do but see that things went smoothly and that discipline was maintained. I joined the camp at the beginning of July and Jill and Angela came down to Hayling and I put them up at a nearby bungalow. I think they had the time of their lives and were very popular. Jill became very proficient at handling a naval whaler and one young sub-lieutenant confessed that they felt ashamed at having to be told what to do by a young girl. Angela was invited to go for a sail in a dinghy by a friend of mine - a local inhabitant - who said afterwards that she took him to task for sailing too far to leeward ! She was eleven at the time.

In my search for a peacetime job I had approached Anglo-Iranian through my friend A.C.Hartley, the originator of 'Pluto', and through him I was offered the post of Personal Assistant to John Jameson, a managing director. I asked him what the prospects were and he merely said he had been Personal Assistant to a managing director which sounded promising. But there are always snags: there were two here. The post could not be filled until 18 months later when the present incumbent moved to another job; and John Jameson was not going to be an easy man to deal with. I had a suspicion that he was an alcoholic. However, I needed a job now, and also anything might happen in 18 months - Jameson might change his mind. So with some regrets I turned it down. The Admiralty gave me details of two possibilities, or at least my friend Captain Manning did. One was with the Control Commission in Germany; the other Manning told me he had made an appointment for me to see the Chief Inspector of Lifeboats at the RNLI. In view of my past experience with the RNLI I did not like this either but he said he had made the appointment and looked to me to keep it.

So I did and walked into the office of the Chief Inspector, Philip Vaux to say at once that I had no intention of applying for the vacant post but Captain Manning insisted that I should come. Vaux said, 'sit down' and proceeded to list a number of reasons why I should consider the matter further. These included the fact that although the post had been advertised with an age limit of 35 - and I was 41 - it had since been realised that when he retired in nine years time there would not be a sufficiently experienced Inspector of Lifeboats to take his place.

According to my record I should be able to do that adequately. Whether I liked the idea or not I needed a job and I gave in and let my name go forward. Events proved I had made a mistake - I should have taken a chance on Anglo-Iranian. None of the points Vaux made came true and for the second time they let me down without a qualm. I went to some lengths over the years to point this out with very little success - all I achieved was to get £200 a year added to my pension and even this was never given the general increases for inflation that wages and ordinary pensions got. But that, I have discovered, is life and the job itself was a good one and exciting at times. However, I was really too old to start making winter passages in small craft, and some of the trips were very rough from start to finish and very exhausting.

I did not let my feelings affect my work and did a great deal of speaking on behalf of the Institution and a number of TV, and Radio broadcasts. I also moved over to the fund-raising side after retiring and also did a survey in depth of all lifeboat services over a period of ten years. For each of these tasks I was paid twenty pounds a week; they were not done at the same time.

All this time I had been doing a certain amount of writing, mostly articles on yachting and other seafaring but also some books which I had had in mind for some time but lacked the time to do them. Two paperbacks and one hardback sold very well but the royalties were small and I could have made more money singing in the street.

So there is my working life. Full of incident and unusual situations. You could say I was a jack of all trades but in fact I was very adaptable and could soon get on with most things. It has been a wonderful life. I have been blessed with a marvellous wife and family, my one regret being that Vera did not live to come here to 'Crosstrees' which I am sure she would have loved.

On reading what I have written I realise I made some serious omissions. These include our various residences and little or nothing about my mother. When we moved from Hastings to Acton we lived first in a flat in Larden road, then a house in Acton lane and finally at 37 Derwentwater road. On our marriage Vera and I rented a flat in Lynton road from Vera's mother. This was in May 1930 and we moved to 21 Highgrove Way, Ruislip in 1935. This was rented by some people from bombed London for most of the war. In 1950 we bought Mill House in Bury street for £5500. It was an old farmhouse, dating from 1645. I retired at the end of 1964 and in 1968 we moved to 16 Hamilton Court, Milford-on-Sea. In 1955 I bought a plot on which we built this bungalow.

Of my mother's early life I really know very little and what I do know may not be entirely factual. As previously noted, her maiden name was Mason and the family lived at Burghfield in Berkshire. As I remember it my mother told me that her father was a carpenter but also kept the village pub. He was a very keen cricketer and so were his children, a boy and three girls, Isabel, Dorothy and Millicent. I cannot remember the boy's name. But in fact Mr Mason must have been an employee of the Great Western Railway as on retiring he was granted a Grace and Favour house in Kensal Green by the company.

I do not remember ever having met him but Grannie Mason I saw several times when she came to stay with Auntie Dot. Mother was a splendid cook and during World War I she served in the VADs as Head Cook of a war hospital in Paddington. My sister Doris also served as a VAD throughout the war and met her husband David Beaton when he was a patient in hospital. He was badly wounded on two occasions and had a pension for life. My sister Winnie's husband John Vinton also served throughout the war and was also wounded. My brother Wally joined up at 18 and served in the Middlesex Regt. from 1915 to 1919. He married Hilda Mulrenan\*, I believe in 1922. I was not present at any of the weddings as I was at sea at the time. (\*Usually 'Rennie')

My father became Mayor of Acton in 1826. Said to be as a result of her efforts on RNLI flag day in pouring rain, my mother contracted Rheumatoid-Arthritis and was an invalid for many years, dying at the age of 67. My father lived to 87, the last years of his life cared for by my sister Doris. I have always regretted not knowing more about my mother's early life and wish she had left some notes for posterity. Nota bene.

Since Vera's death from lung cancer on 29 December 1975 I have lived alone, moving from Hamilton Court to 'Crosstrees' in November 1976. My friends, Basil and Pat Chilcott came to live at East Lodge, next door but one, in August 1976 by which time the building of 'Crosstrees' was complete but I had to remain in 16 Hamilton Court until I sold it. This in fact took two years. The slump in the housing market of today (30/12/91) is no new thing. There has been one every time I have had a house for sale !